

EDITORIAL

THE POWER OF UNITED WOMEN: In Thomas Hardy's *Under the Greenwood Tree*, the village choir, a half dozen men with fiddles, took themselves seriously. Both rector and congregation awaited their lead and followed them through hymns and psalms as sheep follow a shepherd. Then Fancy Day, the new school-teacher, came to church and was ushered to the secluded aisle reserved for young women. We read: "When the singing was in progress there was suddenly discovered to be a strong and shrill reinforcement from some point, ultimately found to be the young women's aisle. At every attempt it grew bolder and more distinct. At the third time of singing these intrusive feminine voices were as mighty as those of the regular singers. The choir members were outraged. "Did ye hear that?" one asked his neighbor. Others said: "Brazen faced hussies!" "Why they were every note as loud as we, fiddles and all, if not louder." "There'd have been no real harm in their singing if they had let nobody hear 'em, and only jined in now and then." And finally, "*Shall anything saucier be found than united 'ooman?*"

Women's Institute members, perhaps more than many others, know something about the power of "united women" — they have demonstrated it in one project after another; and always there will be causes begging their interest. One that has been thrust on our attention rather shockingly more than once in the past year is the overcrowding in our hospital schools for retarded children. Even if we could forget the tragic things that have happened in some of our institutions for the retarded, even though we believe that the attendants are doing their best, the truth remains that, because of overcrowding and insufficient staff, thousands of children cannot have even basic physical care. One doctor asks how many institutions have sufficient staff to change and bathe their infants whenever they need it, or to take time to feed a baby with special feeding problems, or to hold a child in her arms and cuddle and talk or sing to him. The doctor says: "Weeks, months and years pass and many children are seldom or never out of their cribs. No one has time to encourage them to walk at an early age and this retards their language development. So we compound the very problem we are endeavoring to correct."

It is well known that we need more space and more attendants in our institutions. And it is agreed by authorities that smaller institutions are better than large ones; that if or when accommodation is added at Orillia, Smith's Falls or Cedar Springs it should be added in smaller units. Still more important is the movement to provide a number of small residential Homes scattered over the province. The new hospital school at Palmerston is one of these; it will allow attendants to give more personalized attention to the residents. And it is a promising omen for this school that even before it was opened in April, a volunteer service committee was ready to begin services as soon as the children arrived.

Surely the minimum we can ask for our mentally retarded is that they have a chance to develop to the limit of their potential; that they have a life as nearly normal as is possible within their limitations; and that special thought be taken for their happiness, to compensate in every way we can for their deprivation of experiences dear to the normal individual but not the lot of the seriously retarded.

This fairer deal for the mentally handicapped will not come about overnight. And, if we want to help, it will not be enough to have concern and pity; we need to know *how* to help. Fortunately the Ontario Association for Retarded Children has the best authorities in the field ready to give advice and guidance, and one of their suggestions to organizations like the Women's Institute is to get in touch with the nearest association for retarded children to learn what services are most needed. (If the address is not known, write Mr. Peter Gomery, Association for Retarded Children, 77 York Street, Toronto.)

Through such relationships as these we begin to understand the plight of the retarded. We learn what we can do personally to help; and how to be intelligent and effective in our campaigns for public funds to meet the needs that cannot be met by family or friends or public charity. Surely there is a challenge here for united women.

Note: If any Institute has undertaken a special service for retarded children, may we have a report of it for Home and Country, please?—Editor.

Ethel Chapman